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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2009

In Today's Papers

Kurdish Party Leader Addresses His Party Group in the Kurdish Language in Parliament
Media outlets report the leader of the pro-Kurdish DTP, Ahmet Turk, yesterday spoke Kurdish during an address to his party's group meeting in the parliament. Turkey's official broadcaster TRT cut its live broadcast of Turk's meeting with DTP lawmakers after Turk began speaking in Kurdish. Turk said he would continue in Kurdish "in the name of the brotherhood and the beauty of the languages," and stressed, "Turkey must save itself from the shame of banning a tongue in this era." He noted he was speaking Kurdish in recognition of the UNESCO's International Mother Language Day this week to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. TRT said that under the law, no language other than Turkish could be used when delivering parliamentary speeches or group addresses. "If we are not allowed to speak in a native language, then women in chadors should not be allowed in the parliament as well," Turk told reporters after the meeting.

The deputy parliamentary group chief of the ruling AKP, Nihat Ergun, said Turk's actions constituted a "provocative move against the democratic reforms made by the government," as, "The messages given in the parliament should be in Turkish, in our common language, in order to reach all citizens," said Ergun. Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan said in a statement Turk's move "was a breach of the constitution. Use of any language other than Turkish means an open violation of the constitution." Toptan, however, added Turk would not be penalized for defying the law. The main opposition CHP accused TRT of censorship, "TRT's censoring of Turk's speech is not right; TRT should not censor the leader of a political party," Mustafa Ozyurek, the CHP Spokesman, told the press. Meanwhile, Cihan Pacaci, the Secretary-General of the opposition far right MHP, said "Turk has made a mistake. The launch of broadcasts in the Kurdish language on TRT-6 was also a mistake. We have asked in the past what would happen if Kurdish was spoken in the parliament."

Editorial Commentary on 'Kurdish' in Turkish Parliament

Ahmet Altan wrote in leftist Taraf: "It's not end of the world.

Let's face the reality, Kurds speak in Kurdish."

Umur Talu wrote in mainstream Sabah: "What is wrong with seeing a Kurdish parliamentarian speaking in his mother tongue while Kurdish mothers mourn in their own language? We should stop reacting with a clear double standard."

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "The DTP is trying to gain ownership of the Kurdish issue settlement by this untimely and provocative act. The good thing is that negative reactions are not as strong as they used to be."

Mehmet Kamis wrote in Islamist oriented Zaman: "With his untimely act, DTP leader Ahmet Turk made a deliberate provocation. Had he been sincere on settlement for the Kurdish problem, he would have realized the fact that Turkey is on the way toward full democratization, including freeing Kurdish language."

Cengiz Candar wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "What Ahmet Turk did deserves full appreciation. He took a very efficient step toward democratization."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Moderate reactions to the DTP leader's Kurdish speech at the parliament shows that Turkey has changed a lot in a positive way. The soft approach to this matter comes along with a series of past events, including Turkey's opening an intel office in Erbil and the TRT's dedication of a special television channel in the Kurdish language."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "By making Kurdish remarks

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at the parliament, DTP leader Ahmet Turk was trying to draw attention to the AKP's cosmetic efforts on the Kurdish problem. Resolving this issue requires genuine and substantive steps as opposed to PM Erdogan's few words in Kurdish during the southeast election rallies and the state-controlled Kurdish language broadcast."

No Request for a U.S. Military Base in Trabzon or for Combat Troops in Afghanistan
Islamist-oriented Zaman, mainstream CNN Turk, and Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak report, "MFA Spokesman Burak Ozugergin announced that the U.S. has not made a request for a military base in Trabzon or the use of Turkey's bases during a withdrawal from Iraq," and "Turkey has received no request regarding additional combat troops to Afghanistan." In addition, the papers note that Ozugergin said "There are preparations in Erbil to activate a wing of the three-party committee formed by Turkey, the U.S. and Iraq in order to liquidate the PKK."

Ambassador Levy: Rising Anti-Semitism Keeps Israeli Visitors Away from Turkey

Mainstream Aksam carries an exclusive interview with the Israeli Ambassador in Ankara, Gaby Levy. Levy said Prime Minister Erdogan's outburst during a panel meeting in Davos with President Peres had a "discouraging" effect on Israeli tourism to Turkey. "In the past, 10 flights per week would operate between Israel and Turkey, now it's reduced to one or two a week. Compared to Erdogan's walkout in Davos, the real factor blocking the Israeli tourists from visiting Turkey had been the rise of anti-Semitism in your country," emphasized Levy. He said the two countries had overcome problems in the past, expressing faith that they would also manage to leave in the past the recent crisis in Davos. "Many Israeli citizens were born in Turkey, including myself. Turkey is one of the two countries around the world which hosts Jews very well. And we have a very strong military-defense cooperation," said Levy. He noted "Israel backs a unified Iraq and supports Turkey's fight against the PKK." On the Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR) expected to be submitted to the U.S. Congress, Levy said Israel opposes such bills sent to parliaments. "We don't have control over the Jewish lobbies in the U.S., and it's out of the question that we would have an impact on the AGR. We also don't know what the approach of the Jewish lobbies in the U.S. might be," concluded the Israeli Ambassador.

Dink Foundation Applies to Court to Halt Distribution of 'Sari Gelin'

Cumhuriyet and Radikal report the International Hrant Dink Foundation has applied to a court in Istanbul to stop the distribution of "Sari Gelin -- The True Face of the Armenian Question," a documentary film developed by the military General Staff (TGS), to all schools around the country. Turkey's Education Ministry had distributed "Sari Gelin" to schools months ago, requesting in a circular that "all students see the film" and also asking school directors to return a "conclusive report" to the Ministry by the end of February. Last week, around 500 Armenians and intellectuals sent an open letter to the prime minister, protesting the film and the Ministry. The Dink foundation says in its application to the Istanbul court that the documentary would have heavy "destructive effects" on the psychological and mental development of children at the elementary level, and depicts the Armenians as "bad," report papers.

Wiretapping Scandal - The New Victim is Dogan Media Group
Mainstream Milliyet reports that a cell-phone conversation between Dogan Yayin Holding's Vice-President Soner Gedik and tax office director Mehmet Akif Ulusoy was recorded and posted yesterday on several internet websites. Milliyet notes that the phone conversation was conducted without a court-issued warrant and under the knowledge of the Finance Minister to discuss the astronomical tax fine recently imposed upon the Dogan Media Group. Milliyet

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highlights that only a few days ago Deputy PM Cemil Cicek had said that wiretapping without a court decision is a crime and 3 years prison sentence for this kind of crime could be increased if it is necessary.

Alevi Student Exempt from Religious Lesson

Mainstream Hurriyet reports that an Alevi teacher and her husband filed a lawsuit in an Antalya court requesting that their daughter should be exempt from compulsory religious lessons at her primary school on grounds that the lesson did not fit in her religious and philosophical belief. The court decided that the execution should be suspended and the student should be exempt from the religious lessons.

New Kurdish Report Prior to NSC Meeting

Mainstream Sabah reports that Bilgesam Strategic Research Center has prepared a report on the Kurdish issue and sent it to top state officials before tomorrow's National Security Council Meeting. The report summarizes the views and proposals of retired diplomats and retired military officers regarding the Kurdish issue. The report recommends the recognition of Kurdish cultural identity and more tolerance for ethnic political parties.

Iran's 50-Year Nuclear Dream Comes True (Aksam)

Media outlets note that Iran has begun its first tests of a nuclear reactor at the Bushehr plant today, while at the same time the Obama administration appointed a new advisor to the region.

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports in, "Iran Begins Its First Nuclear Power Plant Tests Today," that "The U.S. was close allies with Iran in the 1950s when Iran started their nuclear program, but the 1979 Islamic Revolution ended that alliance." In addition, Zaman notes, "Russia signed an agreement to coordinate with Iran on the plant after Germany and France each cancelled prior agreements to help Iran build the plant." Liberal Radikal reports in "A Bushehr Show from Iran," that "Russian Energy Council Chief Kiriyenko will join the opening of the plant," while "Obama, who has called for dialogue with Iran, appointed Dennis Ross, who is known to be a supporter of Israel, as the Special Envoy for Iran." In "The U.S. Appoints a Special Envoy for Iran," mainstream Aksam reports, "Ross will coordinate the Obama Administration's new foreign policy in the region." Mainstream Hurriyet reports, "Iran Starts Work at the Bushehr Reactor," as "Dennis Ross is Appointed Special Envoy to Iran."

Fitna in the U.S. Congress

Media continue to report on the U.S. Congress' screening of the controversial film by Dutch Politician Geert Wilders entitled "Fitna;" and "fitne" in Turkish means "tension," so the reports make

a play on words by implying that not only the film is being brought into the U.S. Congress, but tension is being brought into the U.S. Congress. Liberal Radikal reports, "Wilders' Fitna Is In The U.S. Congress." Mainstream Aksam reports, "Fitna Enters the U.S. Congress." Leftist Taraf writes, "Fitna Enters Congress."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- Televisions and wire agencies report Wednesday morning that the head of Turkish Special Forces, Behcet Oktay, died in Ankara after shooting himself in the head after allegations linked him to the controversial 'Ergenekon' case. Oktay was mentioned in the testimony of Ergenekon suspect Ibrahim Sahin, the former Special Forces chief.

- On Tuesday, the court file of the Germany-based, Islamist-oriented Deniz Feneri charity arrived at the chief prosecutor's office in Ankara, 170 days after it was requested from Germany. The 3,000 pages of the file will be translated from German to Turkish in March.

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- On Wednesday, President Gul will receive Silvio Ovadya, the head of the Jewish congregation in Turkey.

- World aviation shrank 10 percent whereas Turkish Airlines, THY, grew 21 percent. "THY targets increasing the number of transit travelers by 50 percent among its total passengers," says Director-General Temel Kotil.

World

- In Washington, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyanni expresses full support for Turkey's EU membership, but adds that Turkey's membership was related to the resolution of the Cyprus question.

- Reports claim that Belarus could recognize the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

- US Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says the American economy may climb out of recession in 2009, but a full recovery is unlikely for a number of years.

- French President Nicolas Sarkozy says the EU should protect its industries in the same way the US does, adding EU partners must take "strong decisions" in defense of European interests.

JEFFREY